

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 MCT-01 SY-05
OC-06 CCO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 OPR-02 /085 W
-----161233Z 017249 /45

R 161146Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2842
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY MADRID

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 14358

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PLAB, FR
SUBJECT: ALL MAJOR UNIONS CALL TWENTY-FOUR HOUR
NATIONAL STRIKE ON MAY 24

REF: A. PARIS 13557; B. PARIS 12857

1. SUMMARY: ON MAY 24 FRANCE WILL BE HIT BY A 24-HOUR
GENERAL STRIKE CALLED BY ALL THE COUNTRY'S MAJOR
UNIONS. GOVERNMENT, TRANSPORTATION, ELECTRICITY, AND
GAS SERVICES WILL ALL BE AT LEAST DISRUPTED, AND THIS,
IN TURN, WILL CAUSE MANY OTHER ENTERPRISES TO SUSPEND
OPERATIONS. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE FO IN THIS STRIKE
IS THE RESULT NOT OF ANY DECISION TO JOIN WITH THE
CGT-CFDT-FEN IN PARTISAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY, BUT
RATHER THE CONSEQUENCE OF INTERNAL PRESSURES. THE
FO IS STRIKING BECAUSE OF THE BARRE PLAN'S BLOCKAGE
OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, AND IT KEEPING ITS ACTIVITIES
SEPARATE FROM THOSE OF THE OTHER UNIONS. BUT THESE
DISTINCTIONS WILL BE MEANINGLESS TO MANY PEOPLE, AND
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THE CGT'S EFFORTS TO CORRAL ALL THE UNIONS IN A
COALITION IT WILL BE ABLE TO DOMINATE HAS BEEN ADVANCED
ANOTHER NOTCH. END SUMMARY.

2. ON THE MORNING OF MAY 9, THE MORNING BEFORE THE
FO CONGRESS WAS TO OPEN IN VICHY, THE LEADERS OF
THE CGT, THE CFDT, AND THE FEN CALLED A PRESS CONFER-

ENCE IN PARIS. THEY ANNOUNCED THAT THEY HAD AGREED UPON THE DATE FOR THE 24-HOUR NATIONAL STRIKE THEY HAD SCHEDULED (SEE REF A), BUT HAD DECIDED NOT TO MAKE IT PUBLIC FOR ANOTHER 24 HOURS, SO AS NOT TO JEOPARDIZE THE CHANCES THAT THE FO WOULD JOIN WITH THEM. IN POINT OF FACT, HOWEVER, THEY ALREADY KNEW THAT FO LEADER BERGERON WAS GOING TO CALL ON HIS CONGRESS TO VOTE A STRIKE, AND THAT BOTH BERGERON AND THE PRESS KNEW THAT THEY HAD SET THEIR OWN STRIKE DATE FOR MAY 24.

3. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS CAREFULLY CALCULATED MOVE, FRANCE LEARNED ON THE MORNING OF MAY 10 THAT ITS FOUR MAJOR UNIONS WERE ALL CALLING FOR A NATIONAL 24-HOUR STRIKE ON MAY 24. THIS STRIKE, WHICH IS BEING JOINED BY THE CFTC, THE CGC AND MANY OTHER SMALLER UNIONS, WILL HAVE AN EVEN GREATER IMPACT THAN THE ONE HELD ON APRIL 28 (SEE PARIS 12582) AS IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO DISRUPT THE OPERATION OF THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS CUT OFF TRANSPORTATION AND POWER.

4. THE LEADERS OF THE CGT, THE CFDT AND FEN ALL HAILED THE FO STRIKE CALL AS EVIDENCE OF LABOR SOLIDARITY AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, WITH CFDT LEADER MAIRE OPINING THAT IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT MOVEMENT TOWARDS TRADE UNION UNITY. HOWEVER, AS THE FO CONGRESS PROGRESSED, IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT THERE WAS AND IS NO UNITY BETWEEN THE FO AND THE THREE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OTHER UNIONS. THE FO'S STRIKE IS TO BE SEPARATE FROM THAT OF THE OTHERS, BECAUSE IT IS BEING CALLED FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. THE CGT-CFDT-FEN STRIKE IS "AGAINST AUSTERITY AND FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS" (SEE REF B). THE FO IS STRIKING SOLELY BECAUSE OF BARRE PLAN'S BLOCKAGE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, AND IT HAS NOT CAST ITS LOT IN WITH THE UNION OF THE LEFT OR ANY POLITICAL PARTY.

5. THE FO'S DECISION TO STRIKE STEMMED FROM ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S FEARS OF A SPLIT OR A WALKOUT. THE HEADS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS, FRUSTRATED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S INFLEXIBILITY IN THEIR CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS AND CONCERNED THAT THEIR MEMBERSHIP COULD NOT BE STOPPED FROM JOINING IN THE CGT-CFDT-FEN WALKOUT, WERE PUSHING, EVEN DEMANDING, A STRIKE CALL. THEIR ONLY REAL OPPOSITION CAME FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR UNIONS WHERE THERE IS NO JOB SECURITY AND MILITANCY IS LOW. WITHIN THE FO, THE PUBLIC SECTOR

UNIONS ARE DOMINANT AND THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
ITSELF EXASPERATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND UNWILLING

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-----161234Z 017278 /45

R 161146Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2843
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY LISBON
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TO RUN THE RISK OF A REVOLT EITHER AT THE CONGRESS
OR AFTERWARDS, DECIDED TO CALL FOR A STRIKE. ANY
CHANCE THAT THE DECISION COULD HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED
IN SUCH A WAY AS TO AVOID SEEMING TO BE JOINING WITH
THE CGT-CFDT-FEN WAS SMASHED WHEN THE OTHER 3 UNIONS
LEARNED OF THE FO PLAN (THROUGH THE FEN) AND THEN,
IN ADVANCE OF BERGERON'S SPEECH, FIXED AND SELECTIVELY
LEAKED THE DATE OF THEIR OWN STRIKE. THE CALLING
OF A SEPARATE STRIKE ON A DIFFERENT DATE BEING
CONSIDERED OUT OF THE QUESTION, THE FO EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE VOTED ON THE NIGHT OF MAY 9 TO HAVE
BERGERON CALL FOR A STRIKE ON MAY 24 TOO. (THE
PRIVATE SECTOR UNIONS WERE DISMAYED, BUT THEY KNOW
THAT THEY CAN STRIKE OR NOT AS THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES
PERMIT.)

6. THAT DONE, THE FO LEADERSHIP PRESSED AHEAD TO
MAKE THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION. BERGERON'S OPENING
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SPEECH WHICH CALLED FOR THE STRIKE ELIMINATED THE ONLY SERIOUS THREAT TO THE LEADERSHIP: A REVOLT OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS. THERE REMAINED BUT TO HEAR OUT, AND THEN BRUSH ASIDE, THE SMALL MINORITY OF ACTIVISTS PRESSING FOR EITHER AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OR A COMMON FRONT WITH THE OTHER UNIONS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. BERGERON'S PRINTED GENERAL REPORT WAS ACCEPTED BY A VOTE OF 87.2 PERCENT OF THE 2,200 DELEGATES (THE HIGHEST EVER RECEIVED; HE HAD BEEN EXPECTING 77 PERCENT), AND THE FINAL POLICY PAPER WAS APPROVED BY A VOTE OF 83.5 PERCENT, WITH THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE GETTING 9.1 PERCENT, AND THE TROTSKYITES 6.9 PERCENT. TO THAT EXTENT, THE CONGRESS WAS A PERSONAL TRIUMPH FOR BERGERON, WHOSE ORATORY AND PERSONALITY DOMINATED THE PROCEEDINGS. HOWEVER, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE DELEGATES NEEDED LITTLE URGING TO ENDORSE THE POLICIES BERGERON WAS ADVOCATING: A STRIKE DIRECTED SOLELY AGAINST THE BARRE PLAN'S RESTRAINTS ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING; NO FO PARTICIPATION IN THE CGT-CFDT-FEN ACTIVITIES; AND A REAFFIRMATION OF THE FO'S INDEPENDENCE FROM ALL POLITICAL PARTIES.

7. NEVERTHELESS, AND ALL THE CAREFUL DISTINCTIONS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE HARD FACT REMAINS THAT THE FO HAS BEEN OBLIGED TO JOIN WITH THE CGT-CFDT-FEN ALLIANCE IN A POLITICAL STRIKE, AND THAT THIS KIND OF SITUATION CANNOT BUT BENEFIT THE CGT'S EFFORTS TO CREATE AND THEN DOMINATE A COALITION OF ALL THE FRENCH UNIONS. (THAT THE FRENCH PRESS IS IGNORING THIS CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF COMMUNIST TRADE UNION STRATEGY HAS BEEN INDEPENDENTLY NOTED BY THE BRITISH AND GERMAN LABOR ATTACHES.) THIS TIME, IT IS TRUE THE FO HAS BEEN ABLE TO PRESERVE A SEPARATE IDENTITY AND GOALS WHILE IN EFFECT GOING ALONG. BUT THEY HAVE HAD TO GO ALONG, AND THERE ARE MORE CHALLENGES AHEAD,
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SOME OF WHICH ARE CERTAIN TO TAKE UNEXPECTED FORMS.

8. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS WITHIN THE FO AND WHICH WILL AFFECT ITS ABILITY TO MEET THOSE CHALLENGES IS WHAT APPEARS TO BE A TENDENCY ON THE PART OF THE OLD SOCIALISTS IN THE LEADERSHIP TO DROP THEIR GUARD IN DEALING WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

ASSUMING THAT A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT IS INEVITABLE,
THEY ARE EVEN MAKING DANGEROUS LITTLE CONCESSIONS.

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R 161146Z MAY 77
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(THUS, AND OVER BERGERON'S OBJECTIONS, THE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE AGREED TO PUT INTO THE FINAL POLICY STATEMENT
LANGUAGE REAFFIRMING THE FO'S FIDELITY TO THE SOCIALIST
1906 CHARTER OF AMIENS. THIS CONCESSION WAS IMMEDIATELY
PICKED UP BY THE PRESS AND THROWN UP AT BERGERON AT
A PRESS CONFERENCE AS EVIDENCE THAT FO IS REALLY OF THE
LEFT AND SHOULD STAND UP AND BE COUNTED.) BUT
THESE OLD-TIMERS FEEL THAT MITTERRAND CAN AND WILL
TAKE CARE OF THE COMMUNISTS AND THAT UNDER A GOVERN-
MENT OF THE LEFT THE CGT AND THE CFDT WILL NOT OBTAIN
SPECIAL STATUS. MITTERRAND HAS ASSURED THEM THAT
HE IS IN FAVOR OF THE PLURALISM OF THE FRENCH LABOR
MOVEMENT, AND THEY INTERPRET THAT TO MEAN THAT HE
WILL OPPOSE ANY COMMUNIST-CFDT PUSH TO BRING
ORGANIZATIONAL UNITY TO THE UNIONS UNDER A GOVERNMENT
OF THE LEFT. THEIR ASSUMPTIONS MAY BE CORRECT. BUT,
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
SOCIALIST PARTY'S ROLE IN THE MANEUVERING PROCEEDING
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THE NATIONAL STRIKE CALL, AND THE CGT AND THE CFDT
UNDOUBTEDLY FEEL THAT MITTERRAND OWES THEM SOMETHING.
A GREAT DEAL WOULD SEEM TO DEPEND ON WHETHER OR NOT
THE SOCIALISTS HAVE ANY REAL STRATEGY FOR DEALING
WITH THE CGT-CFDT ALLIANCE SHOULD THEY COME TO POWER.
A NUMBER OF SERIOUS OBSERVERS DOUBT THAT THEY DO; AND
ONE WELL-INFORMED FOREIGN TRADE UNIONIST WHO
ATTENDED THE VICHY CONGRESS LEFT WITH THE FEELING THAT
THE FO SHOULD NOT HAVE STRUCK AND IS NOW IN
DANGER OF BEING SWALLOWED UP. WE HOPE THAT HE IS
UNDUELY PESSIMISTIC.
GAMMON

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